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ABSTRACT

This paper examines factors impacting the acquisition and use of the standard dialect by Australia's Aboriginal youth. It explains that acquisition of a second dialect has implications for the learner's cognitive-affective and sociocultural life and argues that preservation of an "insider" perspective (related to identity) is a key reason for maintaining the first dialect, even when stigmatized in the wider community and inferior to the standard dialect for accessing goods and services in the larger world. The paper suggests that second dialect acquisition may differ from second language acquisition, because the two dialects are in competition in the same life space in a way that first and second languages may not be. The paper considers three areas from which the insider perspective is derived: historical factors associated with Aboriginal English and Australian English; sociolinguistic factors associated with Aboriginal English and Australian English (identity, structure, and function); and psycholinguistic factors associated with Aboriginal English and Australian English (the way it operates to maintain a distinctive world view). The paper concludes that to come to terms with historical, sociolinguistic, and psycholinguistic factors, there must be a radical two-way approach that brings two histories and two dialects into the education system. (Contains 27 references.) (SM)

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Introduction

Current testing programs in Australian educational settings continue to show that Aboriginal students, on average, achieve significantly lower scores in literacy than non-Aboriginal students at comparable ages. For instance, 87.0% of the national student population have achieved the National Year 3 Benchmarks in 1999; as compared to only 66.3% of Aboriginal students (MCEETYA,1999). The West Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment, 2000, also shows significant differences between the achievements in years 3 and 5 of Aboriginal students as compared to the general student population. These differences are equally marked in reading, writing, spelling and numeracy. Data from the Head Office of the Department of Education in Western Australia (Education Department of Western Australia 2001) show that in year 7, the last year of primary schooling, only 66.1% of Aboriginal students achieve at or above level 3 Outcome in Reading as compared to 92.8% of all students. In year 10 the situation is similar, with only 57.2% of Aboriginal students achieving at or above level 4 Outcome in Reading as compared to 86.6% of all students. The retention rate for Aboriginal students from year 8 to year 12 is 22.5% compared to 60.5% of non Aboriginal students (Department of Education, Western Australia, 2001).

The most commonly cited reasons for the lack of Aboriginal students' success blame the students' family background. They include low socio-economic background, poor health, poor education levels of caregivers, neglect and abuse. The additional general

assumption is often that Aboriginal students' inability to engage with school work is due to some learning difficulty or to an inherent deficit in their own language background. All testing is based on students' ability to perform in Standard Australian English and no consideration is given to the fact that, for most Aboriginal students, standard English is a second dialect. Consequently, the most prominent intervention programs designed to improve Aboriginal students' results still tend to operate on variations of a deficit model, where the emphasis is predominantly on finding ways to help students get the 'missing language and social abilities' so that they can then access the school curriculum.

Over the last eight years, the Department of Education in Western Australia has collaborated with Edith Cowan University to find ways to incorporate Aboriginal knowledge and experience as expressed through the home language of Aboriginal students, Aboriginal English, into the West Australian curriculum. In this work, the aim has been to shift educationists' attitudes away from the deficit approach, which endeavours to 'fix up' the students' speech, language and social behaviours, to an additive approach where Aboriginal English is valued and incorporated into the learning process for the benefit of all students. Approaches employed by team members, such as action research, delivery of professional development in the form of workshops or conference presentations and development of teacher resources, have all assisted in the subsequent trials of two-way bidialectal strategies currently underway in a number of classrooms throughout the state of Western Australia within the government education system. The research carried out at Edith Cowan University involves both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers and education personnel who work together to ensure all research processes follow both, established principles

the conveyance of a particular world view. We would argue that the preservation of the "insider" perspective is a key reason for the maintenance of the first dialect, even when it is stigmatized in the wider community and inferior to the standard dialect as means of accessing goods and services in the world at large. We would further suggest that second dialect acquisition may often be more affected by these factors than is second language acquisition, since the two dialects are in competition in the same life space in a way that is not always the case with first and second languages.

We wish to support the above argument with respect to Aboriginal English by considering three areas from which its "insider" perspective is derived: the history of its speakers, the way it is involved in the construction of contemporary social relationships and the way in which it operates to maintain a distinctive world view.

Historical factors associated with Aboriginal English and Australian English

Although no scholar has attempted to date the origin of Aboriginal English as such, Aboriginal engagement with English on a continuing basis dates from 1788 when Governor Arthur Phillip and his party of some 750 convicts and 750 free settlers took up residence in the vicinity of Sydney. Australia's two main dialects of English, Australian English and Aboriginal English, have behind them some 21 decades of development on Australian soil. The same aggregation of regional and stylistic varieties of 18th century English led towards the evolution among the immigrant population of one variety and among the Indigenous population of another. Of course, the inputs which led to the development of the two varieties were not the same, in that Aboriginal English has emerged from both English and Indigenous inputs and

Australian English fundamentally from English inputs. However, the phenomenon of parallel development, in the same macro-speech community, over the same period of time makes Australia a unique and sociolinguistically significant laboratory for the study of English language development. In particular, we are able to assume that wherein Aboriginal English departs from the pattern of development of Australian English it is because of the nature of the initial and ongoing Indigenous input.

According to early records (see further Malcolm and Koscielecki 1997; Malcolm 2000), those Aboriginal people who were engaged in early encounters with the English were not initially as interested as the English expected them to be in interacting with the newcomers to their shores nor in learning to speak in English. A gulf of mutual ignorance separated Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians – a gulf which, in many cases, still exists. The immigrants for the most part were confident that whatever existing language the Aboriginal people had was of little value to them and doomed anyway to extinction. The Aboriginal people knew that what they valued most came from their own community sources, and this included their languages, land and relationships. As all of these came increasingly under threat, Aboriginal people had to come to terms with the immigrants in the interests of survival. However, although this meant making use of various aspects of the imported culture, including its language, this did not mean adopting that culture or its values.

It is in this light that we need to see the adoption of New South Wales Pidgin as a means of cross-cultural communication and as an Indigenous lingua-franca by the Aboriginal people. Although neither side appreciated the fact, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians held their respective cultures dear and although numbers

of academic inquiry as well as the necessary cultural protocols associated with Aboriginal-specific communication. Two-way approaches are being used for data gathering, transcription, analysis and interpretation. This ensures the knowledge is appropriately localised and issues of cultural ownership are properly addressed.

The research carried out at ECU highlights a number of important and otherwise ignored factors in the compulsory education setting. Historically, Aboriginal English provides an Aboriginal cultural vantage point from which Australian English may be ironically viewed and evaluated. Sociolinguistically, Aboriginal English and Australian English have different places in the Australian language ecology and Psycholinguistically, Aboriginal students are affected by being confronted with a different system of conceptual organization in the English they encounter at school and this affects how they respond in the school setting. These factors may be the most important determinants of low achievement in school literacy.

The "insider" perspective

Like the acquisition of a second language, the acquisition of a second dialect has implications for the cognitive/affective and socio-cultural life of the learner. Five Aboriginal authors of an article in the journal *Asian Englishes*, (Collard et al (2000:82)) recently described themselves with respect to Aboriginal English, their first dialect, as "insiders". The "insider" perspective carries with it a great deal of identity-related association. It is for this reason a perspective which is resistant to change. It derives from many dimensions of the dialect, including its inherence in the shared history of its speakers, both past and present, its co-presence in the lived experience of the speaker with significant others, and its implications with respect to

and power were increasingly on the side of the newcomers, that did not mean that the Indigenous people would surrender what they held as "insiders" in the world they had always shared. The acceptance and increasing use of the Pidgin by the Aboriginal people was an appropriation of a new linguistic tool for Indigenous purposes (Troy 1990) and, in the face of the loss of traditional languages, and the lands with which they were associated, the Pidgin became a critical repository of Aboriginal values and world view.

In linguistic terms, what happened as the Pidgin developed was that the conceptualizations from the substrate Aboriginal languages reemerged in the contact variety. This has been demonstrated with respect to certain grammatical features in Australian Pidgin English by Harold Koch (2000), who argues:

> "With respect to recent ideas within creolistics, we can make the following observations. The persistence of syntactic categories from the substratum in the developing pidgin is compatible with the relexification theory of Lefebvre (1996, 1997, 1998). In this approach, the emergent pidgin/creole language is viewed as a new version of the substrate language, the grammar persisting but the lexicon being replaced either by phonetic strings from the superstratum language or by nothing if no match is found for native items..." (Koch, 2000:39).

On the basis of ongoing work on the lexicon of Aboriginal English in Western Australia, and in keeping with what Harkins (1994) has demonstrated with respect to Aboriginal English in Alice Springs, we would argue that the influence of conceptualizations from the substrate languages persisted as the early Pidgin was eventually supplanted in many contexts by Aboriginal English, and that these

conceptualizations also significantly influenced the lexicon, not in terms of form, but at the semantic level.

There are, of course, many words from Aboriginal languages which have become a part of the English of all Australians. Some 400 loans from Aboriginal languages were acknowledged in 1985 for inclusion in the Australian National Dictionary (Dixon, Ramson and Thomas 1990:viii; Moore 2000:134). The most prolific source of such loans is the Dharuk language from the area in New South Wales where settlement first occurred; the second most prolific source is the Nyungar language from the South-west of Western Australia (Dixon, Ramson and Thomas 1990:37). From Dharuk come such everyday Australian words as *dingo, wallaby, wombat, corroboree, boomerang* and *coo-ee,* all of which express peculiarly Australian concepts. From Nyungar come such terms as *jarrah, karri and tuart* (all relating to kinds of eucalyptus tree), *gilgie, marron* (freshwater crustaceans), *dugite* (a venomous snake) and *quokka* (the rat-like member of the kangaroo family which gives Rottnest Island its name).

It is clear that most Australians (depending, in part, on their location on the continent) have experienced the need to use new concepts in talking about Australia and that they have often drawn on the lexicons of Aboriginal languages (and occasionally, of Australian Pidgin English, e.g. *bung* 'not working') for this purpose. However, when we examine in detail the 400 Aboriginal loan words in English (as is done in Dixon, Ramson and Thomas 1990) we find that only a small proportion would be regularly used or even understood by non-Aboriginal Australians. The majority of these words refer to fauna, flora, people, religious concepts, implements and features of the

environment which would not even be recognized by non-Aboriginal Australians. They have, we would surmise, entered English by way of Aboriginal English and they express conceptualizations which are maintained by Aboriginal and not other Australian speakers.

It is also clear, when we observe the Aboriginal influences on the lexicon of English in Australia, that there have been many complex processes operating which have led to the form and function of words of Aboriginal origin in contemporary English. For example, the word *kangaroo*, deriving from the Guugu Yimidhirr language of Cooktown, North Queensland, where it referred to a particular kind of kangaroo and introduced to New South Wales by the colonists, where it was originally understood by the Eora people to be a foreign word referring to edible animals in general (Dixon, Ramson and Thomas 1990:68) is now widely used in Aboriginal English and Australian English, but with different distribution. In general Australian English usage it refers to "*any* of the largest members of the family Macropodidae" (Macquarie Dictionary 1997, italics added), whereas to Aboriginal English speakers it is used variously. In some places its reference is the same as in Australian English (e.g. Maningrida: G.R Mckay pers. comm.) but elsewhere it may be used only for creatures larger than the *euro* (a term rarely used by non-Aboriginal Australians) and then it is usually used "with a distinguishing word" (Dixon, Ramson and Thomas 1990:69) such as: "red" "grey", "brush", etc., and may be substituted for by "boomer" (if it is male) or "roo" ("doe", in some places) if it is female. Another case is "paddymelon", commonly heard in Aboriginal English in the desert areas. This derives from a Dharuk word *badimaliyan*, which referred to a wallaby, but has been reanalysed in English to refer to a "trailing or climbing, annual plant" of African origin which has

been "naturalised in inland Australia". (Dixon, Ramson and Thomas 1990:144). The term *wongi* used to be used to refer to the Western Desert people dwelling in the Mount Margaret area of Western Australia. Now it has been generalized to refer to many other Western Australian Aboriginal people from the desert areas, and it has a second, apparently independent meaning, and a pronunciation variant, perhaps derived from a Nyungar word, according to which it means "a talk". Another way in which Aboriginal speakers have modified the language they have received is by reanalysing English words through mapping unfamiliar phonological patterns onto familiar ones, as in *revision mirror,* for 'rear vision mirror' or *earsdropping* for 'eavesdropping'.

Language, we would argue, is always the servant of conceptualization. Aboriginal words, once used in general English by non-Aboriginal speakers, undergo semantic shift to fill a slot in a European-Australian conceptual system. When these words are employed in Aboriginal English by Aboriginal speakers another semantic shift occurs to enable them to fit an Indigenous world view. In addition, words of English or Aboriginal origin, used in Aboriginal English continue to undergo semantic shift reflecting their speakers' ongoing needs.

The post-contact experience has been significantly different for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. This has been intensified by policies adopted by governments which have limited educational and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people, led to much greater incarceration rates for Aboriginal than for other Australians, made less adequate provision for the health and medical needs of Aboriginal than other Australians and intruded into the family lives of Aboriginal people through

institutionalizing Aboriginal children, thus creating what have come to be called the "stolen generations." Aboriginal English has served its speakers for the expression of many aspects of this experience which has been unshared with most other Australians. Thus, there are various semantic networks associated with the survival lifestyle, with the trauma of anticipated or actual institutionalization, with dealing with ubiquitous sickness and death and with involvement with the justice system. Terms such as *stolen generations*, *sorry day*, *makarrata* ('treaty'), *homeland movement*, *land council*, *Mabo decision*, etc. are noted by Moore (2000) as having entered more general Australian discourse through Aboriginal engagement in the political process. Many other terms are used in ways generally unknown to Australians because their use is restricted to Aboriginal contexts. Such terms include, for example, *take over* (referring to adoption by bush relatives to avoid being "stolen"), *gammon* (nonsense), *open* (stupid, hungry, poor, tired), *smash* (fight), *bony* (thin), *gang bang* (pack rape), etc. Other terms which seem to the non-Aboriginal speaker to be extremely strong or crude (e.g. *flog*, *drop*, *deadly* and many swearwords) may have different connotation in the Aboriginal than in the non-Aboriginal context.

Aboriginal people are aware that the history of Australia since settlement has been passed on through Australian English with a white bias. As the Aboriginal playwright Gerry Bostock put it, "you never read in textbooks about what happened in Australia" (Eagleson, Kaldor and Malcolm 1982:243). Aboriginal people within their own community have maintained their own way of talking, within which such terms as *Captain Cook*, *boss*, *language*, *claimin*, etc. have a significantly different meaning. Such meanings are a part of the knowledge that many Aboriginal children bring to

school and they are not easily going to surrender them for the non-Aboriginal alternatives.

An educational system in which Aboriginal English is denied, either overtly or by implication, will, then, be defining itself as a foreign domain for Aboriginal students. Historically, Aboriginal English has absorbed those aspects of the Australian experience which are distinctively Aboriginal but which have been either ignored or distorted by speakers of Australian English. Aboriginal English provides a link, to the pre-colonial, colonial and recent past experience of Aboriginal people, by means of its distinctive lexicon and grammatical forms. To expect Aboriginal people to submit to an education which recognizes only standard English is to expect them to deny the Australia which they and their people know. It is asking them to consent to a lie, or, to use the term Aboriginal students have repeatedly employed in describing their education (Malcolm and Rochecouste 1998; Collard et al 2000), to put on a mask. For this reason alone, it is unlikely to succeed in the long term.

Sociolinguistic factors associated with Aboriginal English and Australian English

Sociolinguistically, Aboriginal Australians are, in most cases, either bidialectal or bilingual or both. They are, then, in a position of possessing a multiple linguistic repertoire and of expressing by their choices within that repertoire, social as well as linguistic meaning. The distribution of the varieties is diglossic, or, in many cases, polyglossic, with standard Australian English, or a variety approaching that, at the H end of the continuum, Aboriginal vernaculars or creoles at the L end and Aboriginal English in either a mesolectal or (for monolinguals) basilectal (L) position.

We wish to draw attention to three kinds of sociolinguistically relevant variables which determine the selection among varieties (considering, for the purposes of this paper, English varieties only). These variables relate to identity, structure and function.

Identity

Aboriginal students in school are typically in the process of negotiating identity on two fronts: culture and age. They do this in the way they use (or refrain from using) Aboriginal English.

As we have attempted to show above, Aboriginal English is a vehicle for the expression of Aboriginal culture, past and present. Whereas it is often judged by non-Aboriginal speakers as deficient, in that it is used with less linguistic explicitness and simpler morphology than standard Australian English, it has for its speakers the virtues of being unaffected, direct and personal. Speaking Aboriginal English, given the right company, Aboriginal people are comfortable. They are able to be what they are rather than trying to affect a persona which they are not sure they believe in.

In a questionnaire study of the principles of code selection among bidialectal Aborigines (Malcolm 1997:59) the respondents strongly associated the use of Aboriginal English with

- exclusively Aboriginal participants
- communication about Aboriginal matters

- certain speech events, including story telling, talking about sacred things and telling jokes.

The same respondents strongly associated the use of standard English with

- non-Aboriginal and unfamiliar participants
- communication about impersonal or non-Aboriginal matters
- writing

It is clear that Aboriginal English is appropriate in identity-marked settings, where the mutual expression of a common identity is an important part of the communication.

There is also some evidence that age is a relevant variable in choosing to use Aboriginal English. Aboriginal adults, sensitive to the common evaluation of Aboriginal English in the wider society as "rubbish English", and not being aware of its linguistic status as an independent dialect rather than representing an incompetent attempt at speaking standard Australian English, may urge their children not to use the dialect, and to learn and use "proper English" (i.e., school English) (See, e.g., Eagleson, Kaldor and Malcolm 1982:237). This may mean that some adults may, for their children's sake, attempt to move away from the basilect. On the other hand, the children, tend to be less influenced by the desire for proper English than by the desire to speak like their peers, and, in addition, they may be less adept than their parents at code-switching, so that the non-standard dialect may be more strongly in evidence among children than adults.

When they reach the teen years, the identity-related needs of children change. At this stage they may be increasingly influenced by the kind of youth culture which is purveyed by the media, especially in its representation of African Americans, thus

borrowing into their Aboriginal English such expressions as the "man" tag, the "ain't" negator and various terms associated with hip hop music. For some, at this age, there is a further influence from the culture of resistance which expresses itself internationally in certain conventions with respect to the writing of graffiti and the lyrics of songs by anti-establishment figures. Although the Aboriginal youth counter-culture in Perth borrows from these sources, we have observed that, insofar as it remains a coherent Aboriginal speech community, it modifies them and adds to them in distinctively Aboriginal ways. For example, Aboriginal groups' graffiti may be readily recognized as such by those for whom it is intended.

Structure

Aboriginal English is also structurally marked in socially relevant ways. Let us take, for example, an illustration from the phonological level. Because of the different distribution of initial /h/ in Aboriginal English as opposed to standard English, and the apparently random basis of its occurrence or non-occurrence in both dialects, some speakers may find it impossible to switch to standard English without carrying over some of their Aboriginal English conventions with respect to this feature, thus resulting in the production of stigmatized pronunciations where /h/ is added or deleted inappropriately. Teacher attempts to correct such pronunciations may be completely ineffectual (as shown in Malcolm 1980).

Many of the structural features of Aboriginal English are, like this, extensions of trends already present in standard Australian English. For example, with respect to reflexive pronouns, standard English allows

the possessive adjective *my* to be added to *self* to make *myself,* and

the possessive adjective *your* to be added to *self* to make *yourself,*

but it does not allow the same procedure to apply to

his to form **hisself* or

their to form **theirself,*

although these are acceptable in Aboriginal English.

Similarly, when *John* is made possessive it becomes *John's,* but if we substitute *he* for *John*, we cannot in standard English make it possessive by making it *he's,* although Aboriginal English does expect this.

Many, many more examples of this kind could be given, covering many aspects of grammar in which Aboriginal English and standard English share a principle but not the cases of its application.

There are, then, structural reasons why the acquisition of standard English as second dialect is problematic for Aboriginal English speakers. Aboriginal English speakers may justifiably think they already know the system, yet their knowledge of the system no longer seems to serve them adequately.

When we move from the linguistic to the pragmatic dimension we see a further level where an apparently shared system of communication reveals itself as not shared. Aboriginal English relates to a pragmatic context in which participation means free entry to the floor, subject to kinship constraints. Speakers enter or leave the interaction as they have something to share. This means they are not beholden to those who already have the floor to invite them in, nor do they need to wait for a transition relevance point to make a contribution, nor do they need to time their entry so that it does not coincide with that of another contributor. Most importantly of all,

by contrast with the situation in classrooms, nobody will require them to contribute if they have nothing to say. All of this fits a context for the communicative event where the social objectives override the transactional, where one does not have to emerge from the group in order to make a contribution and where time is not treated as a commodity in short supply.

Aboriginal English and standard English are differently packaged in social settings. When Aboriginal students find that the pragmatics of communication which they bring from their cultural background do not apply in school, their insecurity with respect to the use of standard English is increased, forming another structural barrier to the acquisition of fluency in the dialect.

Function

The other sociolinguistic factors we need to mention concern the functions of the standard and non-standard dialects. We have noted that Aboriginal English marks identity for its speakers and that non-Aboriginal English represents its polar opposite. Aboriginal English functions to declare and affirm Aboriginality, to facilitate personalized communication, to enable meanings to be expressed within a context of shared knowledge, so that explicitness is not required. It foregrounds the social and, for the most part, eschews a heavy concentration on transactional functions. Non-Aboriginal Australian English is always perceived by Aboriginal people from the perspective of Aboriginal English. Just as standard English speakers tend to judge Aboriginal English on the basis of what, from their perspective, it lacks- usually word

endings, and verbal elaboration- Aboriginal English speakers judge standard English on the basis of what, from their perspective, it lacks or has too much of. Collard et al (2000) presents a discussion of these issues by a group of Aboriginal English speakers from which we will quote briefly. Standard English, according to Darlene, is to be avoided because "you don't want to come across as a big head or up yourself and you want to relate immediately to people" (Collard et al, 2000:84). Kim perceives that an Aboriginal person using standard English is regarded by his or her people as a "mimic", who must be seeking to gain acceptance from non-Aboriginals (Collard et al, 2000:89). Scott claims "standard English has too many words in it. I've always been of the opinion that Aboriginal English actually takes the useless words out of it and actually transforms it into an English that is useable ..." (Collard et al 2000:90). All these speakers are members of the academic staff of a university and have clearly achieved mastery of standard English, but they still regard the standard variety with ambivalence. It is socially divisive within the Aboriginal community, and, at least for some, it is seen as an inefficient means of communication.

Studies among tertiary students, reported in Malcolm and Rochecouste (1998) show a similar pattern. Commenting on standard English writing, one student said: "I don't like...the Wadjela [white people's] writing. It's too long and it gets boring. And there's too many whys and whom and where and whens all in there" (Malcolm and Rochecouste 1998:68). Another student contrasts her own people, who "talk straight out to you" with non-Aboriginal lecturers who "use other words...those big words... an you lose track what they are talkin about then" (p. 67). Another, again objecting to the words used by a lecturer, calls them "just ridiculous words", adding: "Aboriginal

people can't perceive it or just can't grasp it, because we are just simple, we'll say something straight out..." (p. 67).

The linguistic unfamiliarity of standard English leads to a loss of confidence among Aboriginal English speakers in talking with non-Aboriginal people. This extends to communication with providers of essential services. Lynette (Collard 2000:94), describing such experiences, says: "You try not to talk to non-Aboriginal people, you know. You try not to go to the doctor's or whatever. And if you do talk, you talk with your head down and you mumble a lot, because you're not confident in using standard English." The problem cannot be solved by having the non-Aboriginal person attempt to switch into Aboriginal English. This behaviour is described by Kim (Collard 2000:90) in the terms: "they impose themselves and invite themselves in." This brings us back to the concept of the "insider", which we referred to at the beginning. Aboriginal English identifies insiders and for non-Aboriginal people to attempt to use the dialect is regarded as an imposition.

So Aboriginal English has its functions and standard English has its functions and to cross over from one dialect into the other is to risk offence. Aboriginal people who switch to standard English will be seen as self-important, "flash" and untrue to their identity, and non-Aboriginal people who use Aboriginal English, without authorization, will be seen as patronising or imposing.

There are, then, sociolinguistic constraints which operate against the school's objective of bringing Aboriginal people to fluency in standard English. These constraints may well operate to bring the educational careers of many school students

to an early end, and they remain present in the consciousness even of Aboriginal people who have become fully bidialectal.

Psycholinguistic factors associated with Aboriginal English and Australian English

The use of Aboriginal English and Australian English take place, not only in a sociolinguistic context but also in what has been called (Finch 2000:213) a "macro" context, or a "framework, or background, of shared values and beliefs."

To speakers of standard English it is virtually axiomatic that time and space are different and that there is a gap between past and present and between present and future. One of the ways in which Aboriginal English differs from Australian English is in the way in which it reduces the strength of the boundaries between these categories. Past tense marking is obligatory in standard English but almost redundant in Aboriginal English. Time and space come closer together in Aboriginal English than in standard English, with space expressions being employed to signify points or periods in time. In narration, Aboriginal English speakers often depart from chronological ordering of events. They tend to move by association between present experience and recalled experience, either of the narrator or of the community. Time and space tend to be culturally rather than individually accessed.

This means that the same event may be conceptualized and communicated in very different ways by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal speakers. They use a largely

common linguistic system but put it to the service of different processes of conceptualization.

A similar merging of categories occurs, among Aboriginal English speakers with respect to the physical and spiritual domains. Many of the lexical items which Aboriginal English shares with Australian English are overlaid in Aboriginal English with a spiritual meaning which is not accessed by non-Aboriginal speakers. For example, *clear* is used to mean clear of bad spiritual associations; *clever* implies spiritually powerful; a *doctor* is not a healer only in a physical sense; a *dangerous* thing can be assumed to have spiritual dangers. *Dreaming* relates to the spirit/sacred world, as does *law*. There are very many similar cases, revealing that there is an assumed shared framework of belief which Aboriginal English speakers evoke when they speak to one another but which is not accessed by non-Aboriginal hearers.

Aboriginal English speakers also organize experience differently from non-Aboriginal speakers when they engage in first person narrative. Work carried out on oral narratives from Yamatji and Nyungar people in Western Australia (see, e.g. Malcolm 2001) has shown recurrent patternings of experience which may be seen to derive from schemas, some of which would appear to be of longstanding cultural significance. For example, many narrators depict their experience within a travelling framework, in which successive events or observations are separated by periods of movement around a stretch of country. Another schema organizes experience around the essential elements of hunting activity: travel, observation, persistent attempts resulting in a kill, followed by cooking and eating. Key elements of the hunting schema may be mapped onto other activities, such as fishing and playing team sports.

Another schema focuses on the observations of the narrator; another is concerned with encounters with the spirit world. Such is the familiarity of Aboriginal English speakers with the schemas that a single element in a narrative (for example the word "along", pronounced with vowel elongation, or an allusion to a red-eyed dog or an open window) will be sufficient to evoke them.

There is, then, a world of conceptualization which underlies the use of Aboriginal English. This world is only partly shared with other English speakers. It follows that Aboriginal students in school settings may be tuned in to interpretive frameworks which anticipate Aboriginal narrative and conceptual conventions and find these ineffective in interpreting pedagogical discourse. Likewise, their own verbalizations may be impenetrable to the non-Aboriginal teacher because of their apparent inexplicitness or unpredictable ordering.

It is clear that the acquisition of a second dialect, in the case we are considering, involves more than the acquisition of a linguistic system. Aboriginal people have been known in the past to refer to standard English as "secret English" because there seem to be hidden meanings in what standard English speakers are saying. Such complaints could well relate to the failure to access conceptual differences across dialects. In a similar way, the meanings intended by Aboriginal English speakers are often "secret" from the point of view of the standard English speaker. If second dialect acquisition is to succeed, there must be room for extended give-and-take between Aboriginal English speakers and standard English speakers to enable schematic and other assumed meaning to emerge.

Implications for Acquisition of Standard English as a Second Dialect

In order to come to terms with the historical, sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic facts, there needs to be a radically two-way approach in which two histories are brought into the education system. Two dialects need to be incorporated (rather than one) in order to accommodate for the two conceptual systems. Two-Way bidialectal education will not only benefit the Aboriginal students: the incorporation of Aboriginal English into the curriculum will also benefit non-Aboriginal students. They will have an opportunity to be exposed to a different worldview, they will get a sense of how the world can be interpreted differently through Aboriginal English.

This is in line with both national and state policy on two-way learning. The concept of two-way education has been endorsed by both the Commonwealth government (Commonwealth of Australia, 1994; House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal education, 1985) and the Education Department. The valuing of home language of Indigenous students, which in most cases is Aboriginal English, is seen as central to the teaching of literacy in schools (Ministerial Council on Education, 1995, p. 55).

In addition, the Education Department of Western Australia is currently implementing a major curriculum improvement program in all schools across the state. This

program is based on the Curriculum Framework, a document that was collaboratively produced in Western Australia in consultation with all the educational stakeholders.

> *The Curriculum Framework sets out what all students should know, understand, value and be able to do as a result of the programs they undertake in schools in Western Australia from kindergarten through to year 12. Its fundamental purpose is to provide a structure around which schools can build educational programs that ensure students achieve agreed outcomes. (Curriculum Council, 1998, p6)*

The agreed learning outcomes are articulated in the Overarching Statement and thirteen Overarching Learning Outcomes (pp16-26) which express the holistic and integrated knowledge, understandings, skills, values and attitudes students should acquire by the end of their schooling. These are supported by a set of Statements and Learning Outcomes for each of the eight learning areas endorsed by the Australian Education Council. Together these comprise the mandatory element of the Curriculum Framework for all Western Australian Schools. There are two key elements of the approach to curriculum planning taken by the Western Australian Curriculum Framework that are particularly relevant to Indigenous Australians.

1. The Curriculum Framework explicitly aims to be inclusive of all students.

> *The Curriculum Framework is an inclusive framework for all students in Western Australia. Inclusivity means ensuring that all groups of students are included and valued. (p9)*
> *Inclusivity means providing all groups of students, irrespective of educational setting, with access to a wide and empowering range of*

knowledge, skills and values. It means recognising and accommodating the different starting points, learning rates and previous experiences of individual students or groups of students. (p17)

2 The Curriculum Framework explicitly supports flexibility of approach.

An Outcomes Focus means identifying what students should achieve and focusing on ensuring that they do achieve. ... The outcomes-focused approach will provide schools with more flexibility to enable teachers to develop different learning and teaching programs to help their particular students achieve the outcomes. (p.14)

[T]eaching must be highly adaptive, acknowledging, respecting and accommodating the diverse background experiences students bring to the classroom.(p.35.)

In statements like the above, the Curriculum Framework clearly signals the imperative that educators must find ways to ensure that the education system serves Aboriginal students far more successfully than it has in the past. The Curriculum Framework also explicitly legitimises the flexibility of planning at a school and classroom level that will likely be needed in order to facilitate access to educational privilege for all Aboriginal students as well as all other students. The groundwork has been laid in Western Australia for genuine equity of access to education for all students.

Two-way bidialectal education

The "bidialectal" process is based on current linguistic research which shows that the use of the home language (or dialect) in education leads to better outcomes in the acquisition of the target language (or dialect), improves participation rates and leads to better overall achievement (Bull, 1990; Murtagh, 1982; Siegel, 1997, 1999). Two-way bidialectal education maximises opportunities for students of different backgrounds to interact with each other.

The position argued here is that the kind of intervention required to make acquisition of Standard Australian English successful for Aboriginal students is not, in the first instance, educational, since the factors standing in the way of second dialect acquisition are historical, sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic. Rather than prescribing educational remedies for the educational performance which is a symptom of social exclusion, educators would do well to intervene at the social/psychological level to make schooling a contributor to the contemporary life views and aspirations of Aboriginal students, that is, to make them "insiders" within the school setting.

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